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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000698

SIPDIS

PERSONAL FOR CJCS GENERAL RICHARD B. MYERS FROM AMBASSADOR  
LINDA WATT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2015

TAGS: [OVIP](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PM](#) [POL](#) [CHIEF](#)

SUBJECT: YOUR VISIT TO PANAMA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR LINDA WATT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) When I heard of your plan to visit Panama on April 10 my Embassy immediately began making preparations to welcome you. I personally have been looking forward to meeting you and working with you. Recently Panama has been the focus of intense Washington interest and we have had the honor to host an unprecedented number of USG delegations, including codels Weller, Pombo, Blunt, Taylor, Hyde, and Renzi. Many Panamanians also are traveling to Washington on official business. Normally senior-level USG visits, such as yours, get passing positive mention in the local press. However, the confluence of your visit with two other high-level bilateral visits with military and security themes has me worried about the predictable local reaction. On April 4, Gen. Craddock from U.S. Southern Command will meet with senior Panamanian officials in Panama. On April 6, the Panamanian Minister of Government of Justice will meet with Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and other officials in Washington. Add your visit to the mix and journalists, politicians, and opinion leaders will assume that something big is in the air with the U.S. military and stridently demand to know what it is.

2. (C) As you know, Panama abolished its military after a 21-year dictatorship, following Operation Just Cause and the toppling of Gen. Noriega in 1989. In November 2004, following Sec. Rumsfeld's visit to Panama, we endured uncomfortable and unfounded speculation about a purported "Plan Rumsfeld" and absurd allegations about plans to remilitarize the country. My concern is that an exaggerated public footprint of three back-to-back meetings in one week involving our highest military and defense officials will spawn unfounded suspicion of our intentions. The local press can be counted on to look for a conspiracy in your visit and to give it the worst possible interpretation, unjustified though it is. I know you can appreciate the need to avoid the corrosive influence of distrust and negative publicity in the conduct of bilateral relations. We all are honored that you want to visit Panama and I sincerely hope that you will. But on this occasion I trust you will agree with me and postpone your very welcome visit until another point in the near future, so that your visit to Panama will be constructive and helpful rather than an opportunity for our detractors to create a public relations problem for us and a political circus for the government of Panama.

3. (U) With warm regards and admiration,  
Linda Watt

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